

"The Fighting Trail"

As he spoke Gwyn pushed the throttle over to the last notch. The pendulous engine made the bridge creak beneath it as it tore along at full speed. In the centre it seemed for a moment as though the whole structure with the engine, must hurtle to the river below but by a miracle the bridge held the weight and the engine emerged safely from the smoke at the other end of the bridge.

"Thank God, we're safe," Gwyn said relieved. "It was one chance in—"

"Look! Look! Stop!" Nan shouted. "The chasm bridge. See? They've blocked the track."

Gwyn peered ahead through the dark of approaching night. Directly in the centre of the track he could see a great, dark form loom up at the end of the chasm bridge nearest him. Von Bleck and his men had piled lumber and stones over the track. It was impossible for him to pass and, if he attempted to break through the blockade, they would be thrown into the gully and to certain death. There

was no alternative; Gwyn shut off the throttle and threw on the brakes with a jam. The wheels scraped and the engine slowed and finally stopped. It was within a few feet of the obstruction. The old cable ferry which was close enough to within plain view, was the first thing to attract Gwyn's attention.

"We've got to risk that cable," he cried to Nan. "If we don't get to town everything is off. Are you willing to try?"

Nan nodded, and Gwyn grabbed the basket. It was rotten and tore apart at his first pull. Gwyn threw all his weight on the rope. If it was like the basket, there was no hope. But it held! Nan grasped it also, near Gwyn's heels and, as they swung out into space, von Bleck's men could be heard coming up the road toward the engine.

They stopped for a moment to watch the two gliding along the cable, then ran up to the engine. Von Bleck was at their head. As he approached the steaming train, the hatch of the water tank in the back of it slowly opened, and the wet, bedraggled figure of One-Lung emerged. He handed von Bleck some papers which he held in his hand.

"Here are the deeds," he said. "I got them for you but now you'll have to beat that guy to town and file 'em."

Von Bleck put the papers in his pocket. By this time his men had cleared the track of the obstruction and they all boarded the engine and began to run across the trestle.

"You'd better be careful," One-Lung cautioned. "The water in the tank has run low and we're liable to explode." The driver, however, did not heed his warning and drove ahead at full speed.

At the other end of the bridge Nan and Gwyn had landed safely from their perilous ride across the chasm. They were in a quandary as to how to proceed to town when Causley's automobile, standing where Nan had seen it on her trip to the mine met their eyes. They jumped into it and a thrilling race between the engine and the auto began.

For several miles the race continued, until they arrived at a spot where the road was unusually close to the track. A bullet from the engine had punctured one of Gwyn's tires and thrown the car off a balance, but Gwyn by shooting into the other had overcome this difficulty. The engine was drawing dangerously close to the auto. Nan looked back and screamed a warning, but Gwyn could do no more. He had already been running the car at its highest speed.

Suddenly as Gwyn was struggling to urge the motor even faster, Nan

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shrieked. There was a terrific explosion that shook the ground and the engine was enveloped in smoke. As One-Lung had cautioned, the steam in the empty water tank had caused the boiler to blow out, and it seemed, as Nan and Gwyn looked back, as if everyone aboard the engine must be killed.

Gwyn stopped the car with a jerk and whirled in his seat to look back. The force of the explosion had literally torn the engine to bits. A great hole had been blown in the ground and vapor rose over the scene like a fog. He shuddered, transfixed at the horror of the sight.

It was a matter of humanity now, in spite of the fact that the injured men were their enemies—and deadly enemies. But in moments like this compassion is greater than hate.

Under the cab they found the engineer, dead beside his throttle. They were still searching the wreckage when the whistle of another engine announced the arrival of the sheriff. Von Bleck they found at the foot of the embankment, a very much bruised and battered von Bleck, but stunned rather than seriously hurt.

"I'm glad he isn't dead," Gwyn told the sheriff, "but I shall have to ask you to put him under arrest before he escapes. He and his confederates have stolen the deeds to the mine!"

Von Bleck started and sat up, the old look of cunning breaking through his stupor. He raised a trembling finger and pointed down the road.

"Arrest me?" he laughed. "Don't worry about that sheriff. Look—there is your car. Gwyn stole it. He is a thief!"

It was a small card, but it took the

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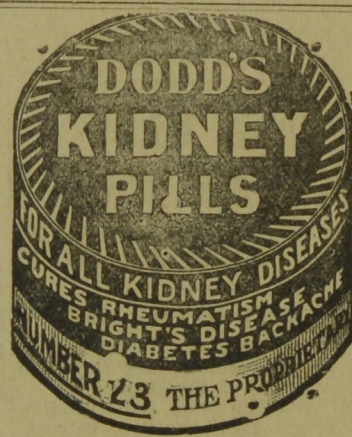
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"Drive on," he commanded. "More speed!" And Causley's car shot out from the swiftly descending shadow as the tree crashed to the ground.

Hogan's brakes were grinding fire as he drew up with a jolt that almost threw the occupants from the car.

They had escaped death by the merest fraction, but danger meant nothing now. The heavy tree lay like a prostrate giant across the path.

Sick with the sense of defeat, Gwyn watched the approach of the other cars that had followed from the wreck.

Then came a horseman—two of them. It was a fighting chance at least. The riders had hardly dismounted before Nan and Gwyn were in the saddles, picking their way over and between the broken foliage and then dashing on up the road. But the first glimpse they had of the commissioner's office was all too convincing

that their race had been in vain. The sheriff's car, with Von Bleck grinning from the tonneau, was just rolling off down the street, and Causley himself stood in the doorway.

(Continued next week.)

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